

# Max, Hannah, and Some Frogs: Kids' Books Bring New Friends

By Penny Schwartz

Boston (JTA) - Frolicking frogs and magical matzah balls are featured in this season's crop of new Passover books for children that are sure to engage, inform, entertain and inspire.

David A. Adler, author of the hugely popular early reader "Cam Jansen" series, offers "The Story of Passover." Adler is highly acclaimed for his straightforward narrative style in non-fiction books, including dozens on Jewish holidays.

He says he likes to appeal to readers of any Jewish background, whether from traditional, observant Jewish families or those who are interested in learning about Passover.

"I like my books to be open and acceptable to all," Adler tells JTA.

With his author's note on the Seder, Adler offers little-known answers to intriguing questions that spark the curiosity of a broad audience.

Other titles this year include "Frogs in the Bed," offering an engaging book version of a lively Passover song, and "Stone Soup with Matzah Balls," which provides a delightful spin on a familiar folk tale.

Passover, which this year begins on the evening of April 14, provides an endless source of inspiration for writers of children's books. Among the dozens that line library shelves, some recount the biblical Exodus, others retell Jewish folktales or tales of Elijah the Prophet, who figures so prominently in the Seder.

Contemporary stories depict families celebrating Passover, and activity books and children's Haggadahs promise to engage kids with puzzles, songs, and jokes through the long night of the Passover Seder.

The winner of the 2014 Sydney Taylor Book Award for young readers given by the Association of Jewish Libraries is a Passover story, "The Longest Night," by Laurel Snyder, illustrated by Catia Chien. The beautifully illustrated book is told in poetic rhyme from the perspective of a young girl as if she were an Israelite slave living through the Exodus from Egypt.

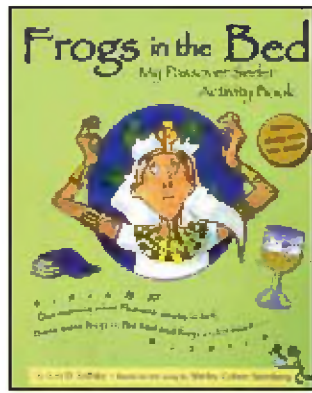
The following is the new crop of children's books for Passover:

## **The Story of Passover**

**David A. Adler, illustrated by Jill Weber**  
**Holiday House (\$15.95);**  
**ages 4-8**

The story that is retold at the Passover Seder begins 3,000 years ago in the biblical days of Jacob as he settles in Egypt. Readers learn how the Israelites become slaves and follow Moses as he is raised by Pharaoh's daughter in the palace and later as he leads the Israelites out of Egypt. Weber's detailed illustrations evoke the color palette and landscape of ancient Egypt. She gently conveys the suffering of the Egyptians through the plagues and the triumph of the Israelites in a fantasy-like drawing as they cross the Red Sea into freedom.

**Frogs in the Bed: My Passover Seder Activity Book**



**Ann D. Koffsky, based on the song by Shirley Cohen Steinberg**  
**Behrman House (\$7.95);**  
**ages 4-7**

Young kids will have fun with the frolicking frogs in a book that also includes a comic book story and activities for before or during the Seder. Koffsky's colorful, cartoon-like illustrations animate the song. Cute frogs turn up everywhere Pharaoh goes. They also pop up out of chandeliers and juggle fruit. The book includes the Four Questions, as well as mazes and other Seder-related distractions. An easy set of instructions with shapes to trace lets kids make their own jumping froggy. The sheet music is included.

## **The Littlest Levine**

**Sandy Lanton, illustrated by Claire Keay**  
**Kar-Ben (\$7.95); ages 3-8**

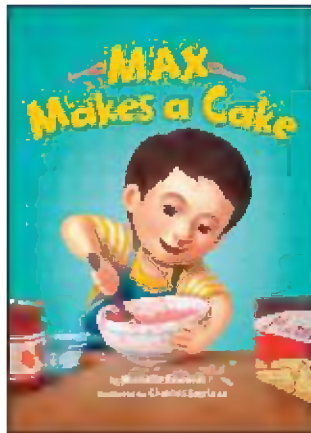


Hannah Levine is not happy about being the littlest (and youngest) one in her family, with two older siblings who do all the things she isn't allowed to do yet. Her grandfather, who lives with the family, keeps reassuring her, "Your holiday is coming, my littlest Levine." As Passover nears, he makes her feel special, teaching her the Four Questions. When it's time for the Seder, Hannah is ready to enjoy the spotlight. This charming intergenerational story will strike a chord for many kids and may help those who are a tad reluctant to recite the Four Questions. Keay's brightly colored illustrations are active, warm, and upbeat.

**Max Makes a Cake**  
**Michelle Edwards, illustrated by Charles Santoso**  
**Random House (\$17.99);**  
**ages 3-7**

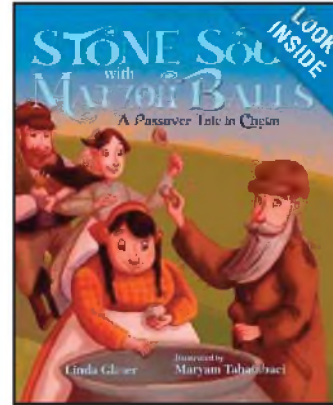
Max is ready for Passover. The endearing young boy knows the Four Questions and can tell his baby sister why Passover is different from all other nights. He's also eager to bake his artist mom a Passover birthday cake. But with the baby in the house, his dad gets a bit distracted. Losing patience

and with little time to spare, the ingenious young fellow takes matters into his own hands. He creates a memorable cake all by himself. The recipe for a Hurry, Hurry, Hurry Cake is included. Santoso's bright, lively illustrations place readers right in the action.

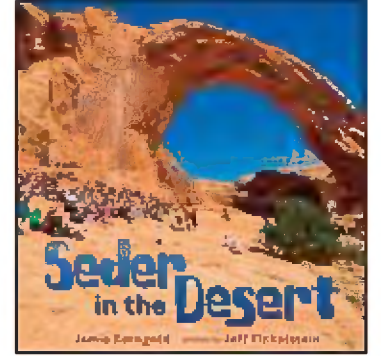


**Stone Soup with Matzah Balls: A Passover Tale in Chelm**  
**Linda Glaser, illustrated by Maryam Tabatabaei**  
**Albert Whitman (\$16.99);**  
**ages 4-7**

In Jewish folk tradition, Chelm is known as a make-believe town filled with naïve fools who, despite themselves, manage to impart wisdom with a huge dose of



humor. In this delightful story, Linda Glaser gives a Chelm spin to a tale told in many cultures around the world. On the eve of Passover, a poor ragged stranger arrives in the village and asks if anyone will invite him in to share the holiday. He quotes from the Haggadah, "All who are hungry come and eat." He sparks their interest by telling them he can make a pot of matzah ball soup from only a stone. With clever prodding, he gets the villagers to create a huge pot of delicious soup, with light and fluffy matzah balls. Maryam Tabatabaei's expressive illustrations are a perfect match for the humorous story, evoking the Old World village with a playful tone.



**Seder in the Desert**  
**Jamie Korngold, photos by Jeff Finkelstein**  
**Kar-Ben (\$7.95); ages 3-8**

This colorful photo essay narrated by a young person offers up something new and unexpected for the holiday. "Why is this Seder different from all others?" the book asks on its opening page. "Because this year we are celebrating Passover in the desert." Readers of all ages will be fascinated as they follow Rabbi Jamie and a large group of people on a hike through the sands and magnificent stone arches that fill Israel's Moab desert landscape. The adventure invites readers to imagine what it might have been like for ancient Israelites to wander the desert in the Exodus story. ☆

## In Germany, Some Closure for the Son of Survivors

By Adam Friedman

New York (JTA) - As a child of Holocaust survivors, I have always managed to avoid visiting Germany. Part of my parents' legacy was never to visit the country, with its dark past - not even to own any products in our home that were made in Germany.

Despite my reluctance to visit Germany, an opportunity arose that I could not forgo. A professional group to which I have belonged for 10 years was holding a meeting in Wiesbaden - the day after Yom Kippur, no less. As the international group of about 40 includes many friends and people with whom I regularly do business, I felt compelled to attend. I also felt that Michael, my German host, would feel slighted if I chose to stay home. After all, Michael is in his 40s and should not be blamed for the sins of his grandparents' generation.

I was pleasantly surprised to find Wiesbaden a most beautiful city with many stately buildings dating from the mid-19th century, when it was a popular spa town for the rich and the royalty of Europe. It was a town that showed no visible scars from World War II, never having been bombed.

But in fact, there were less visible scars that tarnished the history of Wiesbaden. At the onset of World War II, the city was home to 1,500 Jews who had built a most inspiring and architecturally noteworthy synagogue that was destroyed on Kristallnacht in 1938. Subsequently, Wiesbaden's Jews were deported to concentration camps, leaving no survivors. In my research before I arrived,

I discovered that the town had built a memorial to those victims on the very spot where the synagogue was located. I was determined to visit the memorial, so that this trip, which seemed like a betrayal of my parents' memory, would take on some semblance of deeper meaning. I had no idea when I would have the opportunity, as the meeting left little time for anything else.

Michael, who was raised in Wiesbaden, is a sophisticated man who spent his younger years living in the United States and London. As part of the meeting's program, he had invited a speaker to discuss German history, and the speaker began with the reign of Charlemagne. Much to everyone's astonishment, when he discussed the 20th century, he never mentioned the Nazi period. We were all deeply offended and at the break expressed our disappointment to Michael, whereupon he stood before the group and apologized with tears in his eyes.

Suddenly I realized that here was my opportunity. I suggested to Michael that it would be appropriate for him to invite the whole group to visit the memorial to the Jewish victims. Michael eagerly agreed and later that day, most of the group walked to the memorial, not really knowing what to expect. Appropriately, the site is somber with a gray brick wall inscribed with the names of those who perished. I felt that I needed to seize this moment.

I asked my colleagues to gather around while I put on my yarmulke and recited the Kaddish, the Jewish mourner's prayer for

the dead. Although the words are in ancient Aramaic, somehow the meaning was felt more than understood. In a spontaneous outpouring of emotion, everyone burst into tears, hugging each other. The group included Jews, Christians, Hindus, and Muslims, but at this moment we were simply people bound by our common humanity and the sadness over a terrible tragedy. As we stood there, many of the cars that passed by blew their horns in recognition and sympathy.

Michael then led us to a house in front of which was embedded a brass plaque in the sidewalk with the name of a Jewish occupant who had lived there and was deported. We all crouched down to read the name in an act of homage, each of us mouthing a prayer in our own way.

Later that evening, as we walked back to our hotel, Michael turned to me and said, "We learn all about the Nazi period and the Holocaust in school, and we take trips to many sites related to that time, but as Germans, we never talk about it. That is a mistake. We need to talk about it so we won't forget; that's what I learned today."

The following day as I rode the train to the airport, I reviewed that simple yet profound event. I realized that coming to Germany was an act of closure for my own personal history. Even my parents would have understood. ☆

(Adam Friedman is a public relations consultant who lives in New York City.)